

ON
CHURCH CONSECRATION.

CONTAINING

A HISTORY

OF

ITS ORIGIN, PROGRESS AND EFFECTS.

In Answer to a LETTER, from a Friend in the
North, giving an Account of a late Consecration
SERMON.



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A DISCOURSE on the QUESTIONS, WHAT IS CHRISTIANITY? AND, WHERE IS IT TO BE FOUND? By Francis Blackburne M. A. Arch-deacon of Cleveland.

These Questions, of the utmost Importance to every sincere Christian, are in this Discourse most rationally solved. The Author, though a Member and Dignitary of AN ESTABLISHED CHURCH, hath not adopted the peculiar Sentiments of any Sect; but founding his Arguments on the pure Principles of those SACRED RECORDS from whence the different Systems of all Religious Parties are supposed to be drawn, Addresses himself, free from all Prejudice, to every Lover of the Gospel of JESUS CHRIST.

07-2691

THE EDITOR'S PREFACE.

THE following performance was, lately, put into my hands by a friend, who gave me full liberty to publish or suppress it, as I might think proper.

I read it with attention; and, as the sentiments it contains appear to me perfectly agreeable to the native purity and simplicity of the GOSPEL, I did not hesitate to publish it.

The subject was occasionally introduced to the Author's consideration, and he has, for the satisfaction of his friend, taken a very extensive view of it.—Though the writer has freely examined some arguments in favour of CHURCH CONSECRATION, which were pointed out to him as advanced by a Revd. Gentleman on a late occasion, yet his work is by no means to be looked upon as a PARTY PRODUCTION.

Beside the gratification of his enquiring friend, he himself wished to have the fullest evidence in a matter deemed, by some, to be of much importance.—In the course, therefore, of his disquisitions, the arguments alluded to, as they have been repeatedly urged by others, would have naturally fallen under his observation.

A plain christian in doubt about any part of his duty, would naturally consult the NEW TESTAMENT, the only faithful record of the doctrine and practice of Christ and his apostles, and think himself justified in believing and practising what alone is there enjoined; but the craft and ambition of PRIESTS have corrupted this purity of sentiment; and their Decrees and Decisions have been authoritatively set up in room of the gospel.—Church history, which has been reckoned, by some, a monument of the wickedness and vices of priests, affords numberless proofs of the truth of this assertion; and shews at the same time, how vain and idle it is to call certain tenets and practices APOSTOLICAL, which crept into the church in succeeding ages.—It is

deeply distressing to observe, that while religion loses her influence on the minds of men, superstition strengthens, and keeps fast her hold.

The calamities, which flowed from ecclesiastical domination, were severely felt throughout Christendom.—church arrogance and spiritual intolerance, trampling upon christian liberty and charity, oppressed every generous principle of the human mind; and cruelly proscribed all who dared to doubt or dispute their enormous claims.—Hence the damning sin of SCHISM.—But it is fortunate for many, that what is Schism in one kingdom, is established truth in another.—In Scotland, Episcopacy yields to Presbytery; and in England, Episcopacy claims her superiority: While they both kiss the hand of our gracious Sovereign as their common DEFENDER. It is true, that the legislature hath, in justice and equity, given PROTESTANT DISSENTERS a legal RIGHT to withhold themselves from the communion of the established church; indeed that very AUTHORITY, on which the existence of the established church depends, hath taken their churches and the worship performed in them, under its care and protection. It would, therefore, be ridiculously ignorant in any one to charge them with Schism on account of their non-conformity.

Every liberal inquirer must sincerely lament the fate of christianity, as it has been debased by superstition and the doctrines of fallible men; and its genuine friends cannot help feeling a warm indignation at the corruptions, which the crafty and ambitious have introduced into the purest and most benevolent system that was ever divulged to mankind.—Its doctrines speak peace and good will among men.—Its practice makes us happy here, and constitutes our bliss hereafter. And when the worldly abuses, which have darkened and disgraced it, shall be removed, the happy influence of the Gospel will be felt and acknowledged by all; The religion of Christ will then stand confessed the wisdom of God.

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L E T T E R, &c.

S I R,

I RECEIVED a letter from you some time ago, requesting my thoughts upon the consecration of churches. You tell me, that immediately after the consecration of your new Church, a Sermon was preached, the design of which was to prove the Divine original of this rite; and that in this discourse some reflections of an offensive nature were thrown upon Protestant Dissenters; in particular, that their separation from the established Church was branded with the name of Schism. With regard to these reflections you allege, I am apt to believe, they must be founded on a misapprehension of the preacher's words. For I cannot allow my self to think, that he would have used expressions, that might have the least tendency to disturb that perfect harmony, which has so long subsisted between the members of the Established Church, and the Protestant Dissenters of Belfast. The distinction had entirely disappeared in that happy moderation, by which both professions were equally distinguished. I cannot therefore bring myself to believe that he would have payed so little regard to common sense, the manners of a gentleman, and the principles of a christian, as to throw out re-

A reflections

reflections that might give the Dissenters any just ground of offence; because of course it might endanger a misunderstanding between them and their brethren of the church; for he could not but know, that reflections issuing from a pulpit, soon become subjects of controversy among the people. Therefore even in the absence of a more generous principle, prudence would have guarded him from using the freedoms you mention. Besides, if I am not misinformed, your Dissenting congregations strove with each other, which should be most forward to accommodate him with a house, during the three years that he wanted a church. And can you possibly imagine, that the very first Sunday after he left you, and got possession of his new church, he could think of abusing you; no, it did not ly in his way, nor was it necessary to a consecration sermon. I therefore repeat it, you must be in a mistake; you have misapprehended him, and upon comparing notes with other hearers, you will, perhaps, find that I am right.

This, however, renders it no way improper, that I should so far comply with your request, as to offer you my sentiments concerning the consecration of churches. I hope the gentleman who endeavoured to satisfy his audience, that it is of Divine original, and warranted by Divine authority, will not be displeased at the freedom I must necessarily use in the discussion of this subject. You do not pretend to describe nor even to know the form of consecration used on that occasion by your Bishop. From the character he bears, I presume it was as much divested of foppery, as such a rite possibly could be.----A printed form however for the church of Ireland, you will find in their larger Prayer Books, and as being the
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the form expressly designed for the church of this kingdom, I shall in the following enquiry keep it all along in my view ; by this all concerned will have it in their power to detect me, if I strain its meaning, or misrepresent its language. I the more willingly adhere to this public avowed form, as I find it contains all the topics enlarged upon by your preacher, in support of church consecration. In the same book, you will also find a method they have devised, for the expiation of a church, after it has been desecrated by certain defilements---Yet it is somewhat strange, that an after-consecration should restore that sanctity to a church, which a former could not preserve. But you will think it time I should have done with my preamble----I think so too.

If by consecrating a church, nothing more was meant, than a conveyance of it from the Donor to a Parish for the purpose of divine worship, no exception could be taken ; this implies no mystery, it is altogether a civil transaction. But something, very different from this, is supposed to be effected by this rite, namely, That it diffuseth real sanctity through the material building ; that it conveys holiness to the various utensils employed in worship ; that it renders the worship itself acceptable to God. These are the effects they ascribe to the operations of this rite, as you were informed, by the discourse you heard, and as you may also perceive, by looking into the consecration service. The virtues of which they suppose this rite possessed, are truly wonderful ; but my animadversions upon the absurdities it contains, I reserve to the conclusion of my letter. In the mean time, I shall examine the authorities which they bring to support it, if these are good,

our objections must be founded in ignorance, if bad, *their* rite must be the offspring of superstition.

I shall begin, where they do, at *Jacob's pillar*; this you tell me had the lead in the preacher's arguments. It must indeed be confessed, that his church cannot be charged with singularity, in producing this instance as a warrant for church consecration. We find in the Pagan churches of old, stones were anointed with oil; and in particular, from *Pausanias* we learn, that in the neighbourhood of *Delpbos*, there was a small stone, on which they poured oil every day; and from the word *Betbel*, came the *Betylia* of the Heathens, a sort of rude stones, which they worshipped as symbols of divinity. So that *Jacob's pillar* hath been of service to more churches than one. It is however a little surprising, that with one consent, they should have all agreed, to select this instance in preference to many others, to be met with in the Patriarchal age. *Noah*, *Abraham* and *Isaac* had erected altars prior to this one set up by *Jacob*; these, as being of greater antiquity, ought rather to have been pleaded as more in point. But if you will attend to one circumstance, it will explain the mystery. Of the former it is only said, they built altars. *Jacob* not only built, but anointed his. Now in the act of anointing, the Patriarch is supposed, by oil as the medium, to have communicated certain virtues to his *pillar*; hence no doubt it hath been honoured with the first place, in their arguments for church consecration. Could the venerable Patriarch have foreseen the superstitions, which in after ages would be erected upon his pillar, I am persuaded, he would never have set it up.

In those days, the worship of God was esteemed
honourable,

honourable, and the mode of expressing it was natural. It consisted in presenting the Almighty, with a part of their substance, as an acknowledgment to him, from whom they derived the whole. It arose from gratitude, the genuine principle of true devotion. For the purpose of presenting their offerings, they erected altars composed of such rude materials as the spot afforded. They were determined in the choice of the place, by some signal manifestation, either of the presence of God, or by some remarkable blessings received from him. This is the plain account of altars under the Patriarchal dispensation. As to their form of consecration, I confess my ignorance; besides the simple appropriation of them to a religious use, I know of none; and even for this, they had no other form, but that of presenting their offerings upon them, as soon as they were erected; a practice which, you know, would not be permitted in our modern churches, for no worship can be performed in them, till they are first prepared for it by consecration.

But to return to Jacob; the case was shortly this. By his fathers direction he set out for *Padan-aram*, the place of his grandfather's residence, and overtaken by the night, he laid himself down to sleep; during which, he was favoured with an extraordinary manifestation of the Divine presence. In the morning, he said, "Surely the Lord is in this place," and in allusion to the ladder which appeared to him reaching from earth to heaven, "This is none other, said he, but the house of God, this is the gate of heaven." Eager to express his acknowledgment, for the glorious manifestation vouchsafed to him, he immediately erects an altar, and presents God with an offering of

oil *. Some time after this, he returned to Bethel, and in the place where he talked with God, he set up a *pillar*, " Even a pillar of stone : And he poured a drink-offering thereon, and he poured oil thereon †." On both occasions, we find, that *Jacob*, in conformity to the mode of external worship which prevailed in that age, made an altar, and presented on it offerings to God. We have no intimation that, for the purpose of rendering them acceptable, he previously diffused holiness through the material substance of the altar : Should it be alleged, that this was effected by the oil, and the water. Why do not our church *dignitaries* pour oil and water upon their churches also? But you are to observe, that while they plead the authority of *Jacob*, they actually reverse his method. He did not pretend (by any act of his) to make the place in which he worshipped holy, but he worshipped in it, because the presence of God was there visibly manifested. He called it the house of God, and the gate of Heaven, before he set up the *pillar* or poured oil upon it. Our churches on the contrary, are not the houses of God, nor the gates of Heaven, till our Bishops have made them so. If they will bring in *Jacob's* practice to countenance theirs ; I think it would be but decent, to keep to his method also. But this, though a piece of strict justice, would not so well have answered the views of the priesthood. The exclusive privilege, of communicating sanctity to churches, being vested in *Bishops*, could not fail of creating a mighty veneration for the *Bishops* themselves.

Having made these few remarks upon the preacher's

* Gen. 28.

† Gen. 35.

er's first argument, I presume we may dismiss it, and proceed to try the solidity of his other *pillars*.

You tell me, that he insisted upon the consecration of the tabernacle, and the dedication of the temple, as warrants that sufficiently authorised the rite of church consecration.

It must be allowed, that under the Jewish dispensation, but not before, consecration was introduced. Yet it is surprising, that a christian preacher, should propose to establish the rites of a christian church, upon the authority of a dispensation, which now doth not exist: But of this a little more hereafter. The present argument, even supposing the Jewish law unrepealed, and still in force, will not be found to give the least countenance to consecration, as practised in the christian church. This I shall endeavour to make appear, and I hope to your satisfaction.

In the Patriarchal age, we read of no tabernacles, temples, churches or chappels; the simplicity of these times, could furnish out no idea of the magnificent buildings, within which the presence of the Almighty was to be confined in after times. The holy men of this early age seem not to have entertained the most distant apprehension, that the Father of the universe, might not, with equal acceptance, be worshipped here, there, or any where. In places indeed, where he manifested a more immediate presence, or in any remarkable manner displayed his benignity, they erected altars, and called upon his name; but to these occasional spots, they ascribed no permanent holiness. The unbounded universe, they considered as the *temple* of the Almighty; and, independent

pendent of every local situation, they performed acts of religious worship. But the time was approaching, in which there would be a sad degeneracy from these sublime sentiments which the venerable Patriarchs entertained.

Their descendants, rescued from the hand of oppression, were led out of Egypt by the power of the Almighty. They were indeed grateful for their deliverance, but their souls were debased by the superstitions of the land they had left. In the second year from their entering the wilderness, as a preservative against idolatry, it became necessary to erect a tabernacle; which, some time after their establishment in the promised land, was succeeded by the more magnificent structure of a *fixed temple*. To me it is not clear, that God commanded the one, or the other; that he permitted both is certain; as also that *Moses* was directed to sanctify the one as *Solomon* was permitted to dedicate the other. From these two precedents, our priesthood contend for the necessity of church consecration, and, indeed, they are the chief arguments, on which they seem to rest their cause.

Now let us suppose that they are good and sufficient authority for our Bishops to consecrate their places of worship: Then even by themselves it must be allowed, that in performing the service, they ought to adhere to the patterns from which they claim their right. I will not be so rigorous as to insist upon their churches being built, and furnished, after the manner of the *tabernacle* or *temple*. But upon this, we have a right to insist, That in consecrating their places of worship, they strictly conform

to the meaning and intention of *Moses* and *Solomon*, in consecrating theirs. Unless this conformity is observed, they derive no authority, no countenance from them at all. What correspondence there is, between the one practice and the other, will best appear by considering each.

Moses, as commanded by God, did hallow the tabernacle, sanctify the altar, and the various utensils to be employed in the service. Now the question is, What ideas do we find annexed to these terms under the Jewish law? Do they denote an infusion of sanctity into the things they are applied to? No, not a hint in the whole Bible to countenance this supposition. The truth is, the Hebrew root, which signifieth to *sanctify* or *hallow*, denotes the action of setting something apart for God *. As expressive of this, we find it applied not only to persons, but to times, places and things. In this sense, the *tabernacle* and *temple*, the *sabbaths* and *Jewish festivals*, the *ark*, the *golden table*, &c. were said to be hallowed, sanctified and made holy, thereby meaning only, that these things were appropriated to the service and worship of God. Now if we allow *Moses* to have understood the language he spoke, and to have used it in the sense understood by the people, his consecration of the tabernacle was a very simple affair. The whole action consisted, in appropriating a house, erected by the voluntary contribution of the people, to the service of God. *Moses* was commanded to do this, and he pretended to do nothing more.

The dedication of the *temple* was, if possible, more simple still. It was not by anointing, as that of the *tabernacle*.

* Richie on Revel. Sect 1. Part 3.

tabernacle. Solomon used no form of consecration. He set apart the temple, as *Moses* had done the tabernacle for the purpose of religious worship*, and he did this, not by previously communicating sanctity to the house; but by immediately entering on the temple service, attended with the elders of *Israel* and the heads of the tribes. The service indeed on this occasion was splendid and magnificent almost beyond conception: But it was not performed in honour of the house, but in honour of God. It was not to infuse holiness into the temple, but to celebrate the holiness of the Almighty. But we are told of his consecration prayer; what is most absurdly called a consecration prayer, is perhaps one of the noblest addresses that ever was presented at the throne of God. Solomon kneeled before the altar; not one ray of holiness did he implore for it; but with uplifted hands, in the most exalted strain of the purest benevolence, he devoutly addressed the Almighty, that he would graciously hear every worshipper of his name, that should worship in, or towards this house†. Then he arose and blessed, not the temple, but all the congregation of *Israel*.

I would now solicit your attention to the consecration of our modern temples. If you expect to find an agreement with that, practised under the old dispensation, either as to the manner or design, you will be much disappointed. The obvious intention
of

* 1 Kings chap 8.

† The temple was dignified by a visible and permanent manifestation of the Divine presence, hence the reason of the people being directed to worship *in*, or if at a distance, *towards* this house.

of *Moses* and *Solomon*, was to appropriate their houses to the purpose of public worship. How far this simplicity is maintained in the consecration form of our church, I leave you to collect from the following description, for the truth of which, I appeal to the **DIRECTORY FOR THE CONSECRATION OR DEDICATION OF CHURCHES AND CHAPPELS ACCORDING TO THE USE OF THE CHURCH OF IRELAND.** "When a church is to be consecrated, at an appointed day, the Bishop, with a convenient number of his clergy (of which the Dean or Arch-deacon to be one) and the Chancellor of the diocese and his register shall come between the hours of eight and ten in the morning; and when they are near, the bell is to ring, till they be entered into the church appointed to be consecrated. First, the Bishop and his clergy together with the Patron, or his deputy, shall go round about the cemetery, or church yard; which done, the Bishop, and his clergy shall enter into the church, at the West door, the Patron and the people standing without while the Bishop and Priest do vest themselves in their respective ecclesiastick habits. When they are vested, they shall kneel down in the body of the church, with their faces to the East, and say together, &c.----Then rising up they shall go together to the West door, and the Dean or Arch-deacon on one hand, and the Chancellor on the other, shall bring the Patron to the threshold of the West door, and present him to the Bishop, who shall thus say to him, &c.---The Patron shall answer, or some of the clergy, at his request and appointment shall answer for him, &c.----Then shall the Patron kneel down and receive the Bishops blessing, &c.----The Patron arising,

ing, the Bishop shall call for the instrument of
 donation, which the Bishop receiving from the
 hands of the Patron, shall deliver to the register,
 to be read publickly in that place. Which being
 done, all may enter into the church: Then shall
 the Bishop, attended by his clergy, kneel in the
 body of the church, before the chancel door, at a
 convenient distance, upon a footstep raised higher
 than the floor, and shall say, &c.----The Bishop
 and congregation rising from their knees, the Bi-
 shop attended by his clergy, shall go in procession
 round about the church within, and say this hymn
 alternately, &c.----Then shall the Bishop go to
 the vault appointed in the church for the burial
 place, in case there be any, or else standing in the
 most open pavement of the church, the Arch-dea-
 con shall read, &c.----The Bishop standing in the
 same place shall pray, &c.----The Bishop with
 the clergy attending, shall go to the font, and the
 vergier or clerk, presenting pure water to him, he
 shall pour the water into the font. The senior
 priest read this lesson, &c.----The Bishop pray, &c.
 ----Then the Bishop shall go, attended as before, to
 the pulpit, and laying his hand upon it, shall ap-
 point one of the priests to read the following lesson,
 &c.----The Bishop pray.----The Bishop and clergy
 shall go towards the chancel, the doors of which
 being shut, he shall stand there, and with the priests
 recite this hymn alternately, &c.----The doors be-
 ing opened, the Bishop with his clergy shall en-
 ter, and ascend to the communion table, and sitting
 in a chair on the south side of it, shall appoint the
 Dean or Arch-deacon to read, &c.----The Bishop
 arising from his chair, shall kneel before the
 altar, or communion table, and say, &c.----Then
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“ the Bishop arising shall return to his chair, and sit-
 “ ting covered, some persons, by the Patrons appoint-
 “ ment, shall bring the carpet, the communion-cloth,
 “ and napkins, the chalice, paten, and other vessels,
 “ books and utensils for the communion, and hum-
 “ bly presenting them on their knees to God, the Bi-
 “ shop shall receive them severally, and deliver them
 “ to the Deacon, to be laid orderly on the commu-
 “ nion table; excepting only the chalice and the pa-
 “ ten, which two priests shall (when the table is co-
 “ vered) humbly on their knees lay upon it. The
 “ Bishop returning to the altar, shall with reverence
 “ and solemnity (his face being to the eastward) lay
 “ his hands upon the plate, and say this prayer stand-
 “ ing, &c.—The Bishop shall go to the north side of
 “ the holy table, and turning to the people shall say,
 “ The Lord be with you,” to which they reply,
 “ And with thy spirit.” Then follow three prayers,
 to which the Bishop adds a prayer of a St. Clements.
 “ ———The Bishop arising, shall sit in his chair, at
 “ the South end of the holy table, and being co-
 “ vered, shall cause the Chancellor to read the in-
 “ strument of consecration, and give command that
 “ it be entered into the registry, and an act made of
 “ it, in perpetuam rei memoriam.-----After which,
 “ an anathematism shall be read by him and his cler-
 “ gy, alternately, all standing up.-----Then shall
 “ the Bishop conclude with an acclamation, the cler-
 “ gy answering alternately.” So ends our blessed rite
 of consecration.

From this description, given you verbatim from
 their directory *, could you possibly imagine, that a
 house, thus consecrated, was intended for a place of

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* See Folio Edition printed by Grierson, 1760.

christian worship? No, I am persuaded, you would not think it was designed either for the worship of a christian or a Jew. You might possibly think it liker the service performed in the Pantheon of ancient *Rome*, where they had all the gods and goddesses of the empire collected together. You might also be strongly tempted to suspect, that our church had borrowed their bowings, kneelings, turnings, movements and positions, from the religious service practised in the Pantheon, which, from the multitude of divinities worshipped there, must have been exceedingly various. Whatever you may think as to this, one thing you must clearly perceive, that our modern consecration form, bears not the least resemblance to the practice of *Moses*, or that of *Solomon*. But if from the surface, we look into the substance of our Irish form, we shall discover a more shocking discordancy still-----We do not find that *Moses* or *Solomon* in dedicating their places of worship, used any expressions similar to those used by our Bishops. They did not say as the latter do, "Blessed spirit
 " send down upon this place, thy sanctifying power
 " and grace, and communicate to it effusions of thy
 " holiness." Neither did they go to the laver, as the Bishop doth to the font, and pray as he doth,
 " O eternal God, sanctify the water which thou hast
 " ordained for the *mystical* washing away of sin." Neither did they pray over the places of reading and expounding the law, as the Bishop doth over the reading desk and pulpit.-----We have no account of their praying over the basons, dishes, cups and other vessels of the tabernacle or temple-----And so far from going to the pavement to pray over burial ground, no such ground was permitted in, or near their places of worship.

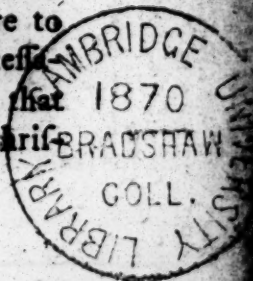
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By this time you will have read enough to be convinced, that there is not the least affinity, either as to manner or intention, between our modern consecration rite, and the practice either of *Moses* or *Solomon*. I am inclined to think, that the legislator of the *Hebrews*, and the king of *Israel*, would have reprobated their proceedings, as the offspring of idolatry.

Now, what can we, what should we think of our established church, in claiming a warrant from precedents, with which they have not the decency to observe the least resemblance?

You may observe, that I have hitherto reasoned upon the supposition, that these precedents remain in force, and that the old law is still unrepealed. Though this is making as large an allowance as the church could require, yet you see it gives not the least countenance to their mode of consecration; nay, it is utterly disclaimed, as totally unknown to that dispensation from which they pretend to have derived it.

But, sir, though their practice were what it is not, in exact conformity with that of *Moses*, or that of *Solomon*: Yet neither would this give it even the shadow of authority. For that dispensation no longer exists. It was expressly abolished by the same authority that set it up. The Jewish ritual, upon the introduction of the gospel, was dissolved for ever; and the positive institutions of the former, were to be of no authority under the latter. It is unnecessary to enlarge upon this: Yet, is it not amazing, that



a christian priesthood, should have recourse to an old abrogated system of rituals, to authorise the ceremonies they introduce into christian churches; a system, with which they have no more connection, than with the ritual of *Cbina*, or that of the *Mosque*. If they pretend such a veneration for Jewish ceremonies, why do they not translate more of them into their service; for if they ought to use one rite, by the same rule, they ought to use them all. In particular, at the consecration of their churches, why do they not, as *Solomon* certainly did, at the dedication of the temple, sacrifice twenty two thousand oxen, and one hundred and twenty thousand sheep*, and have they not an hundred and twenty priests sounding with trumpets †?

I hope it now fully appears to you, that our church consecration rite receives no countenance, derives no authority, either from the Patriarchal or Mosaick dispensation. I now proceed to that DISPENSATION to which the preacher ought most religiously to have confined his attention, and from which he ought to have produced all his authorities. As the gospel has superseded the Jewish, and every other dispensation that preceded it; as it contains the whole will of God respecting faith and practice; as it is declared to be of perpetual obligation to the end of the world, of course, nothing can be urged, as necessary to be believed or practised, but what is contained therein. If church consecration is necessary to the acceptable performance of divine worship, then it was as necessary expressly to ordain it, as to explain the nature of the worship itself: For to little purpose hath, Jesus taught wherein the latter doth consist,

* 1 Kings viii. 63. † 2 Chron. v. 1.

consist, if for its acceptance it was to depend upon something, of which he did not chuse to give us information. I therefore affirm, That if consecration is necessary, either for the purpose of giving sanctity to churches, or for rendering worship acceptable to God, there must be a command in the gospel appointing it; or what is equivalent, it must be authorized by the practice of Jesus and his apostles.

Now the question turns upon this point. Do we find in the New Testament a *command*, enjoining, or an *example*, authorising the consecration of churches? You tell me that the preacher was exceedingly sparing of his arguments from this quarter; he produced but one, and it was the presence of Jesus at the feast of dedication. I wish he had reconsidered this matter, before he gave it a place among his arguments; for should it be allowed, that this feast was of divine appointment, still it was not a Christian, but a Jewish institution, with which we have no manner of concern, for the reasons already assigned. But he ought to have known, that this feast, which he supposes to have been countenanced by Jesus, was of meer human invention. It was appointed neither by *Moses* nor *Solomon*, nor by any other, in virtue of a commission from God. It was instituted by the authority of *Judas Maccabeus**, and by him ordained to be kept yearly for the space of eight days, in commemoration of his having recovered the city, rebuilt the altar, and restored the temple worship. This you will find to be the origin of the dedication feast; from which you may perceive, that it was not of Divine, but military extraction. To this the preacher may reply. The pro-

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* Maccab. 4. 2 Maccab. 10.

festion of Maccabeus is nothing to the point; the presence of Christ gave the sanction, upon which we insist. But where does he find that our Saviour's being in the temple on that occasion, was on purpose to countenance this rite? Is it said, that he went to celebrate the festival? No, only that during the celebration, he was walking in *Solomon's* porch. The conversation, in which we find him engaged with the Jews there, would incline us to think, that he had rather discountenanced, than approved of this feast; for he was obliged to flee, to prevent his being stoned to death*. Had he attended to this passage, he would have found that Jesus was not celebrating the feast, but preaching to the people; that he was not establishing a precedent for church consecration, but instructing the multitude concerning his own character and mission. So that this argument, you may perceive, was just as good as none. We may therefore dismiss it as utterly incapable of giving his consecration rite the least assistance.

Let us now enquire if it was countenanced by the *doctrine* or *practice* of Jesus.

With regard to the first, We find, that as occasion offered, he did in a very pointed manner declare against all ideas of local sanctity. Between the Jews and Samaritans there had long subsisted an obstinate contest: The one maintained, That God should be worshipped on mount *Gerizim*, the other, That he could be worshipped at *Jerusalem* only. Jesus, in his conversation with the Samaritan woman, thus resolves the case. * Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain

* John x. 22.

mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem worship the Father *." As he equally declared against both places, do we find, that he pointed out any other, either already consecrated, or, by his direction, thereafter to be so? No, as to places, not a word. "The hour cometh, saith he, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the father in spirit and in truth, for the father seeketh such to worship him †." Here is a plain declaration, that under the gospel, the worship of God was to derive its value, not from the place of the worshipper, but from the temper of his mind. We cannot therefore but think, that it would be infinitely more becoming in the church, to inculcate this upon their hearers as the just idea of Divine worship, than to amuse them with a pompous rite, which directly tends to create a persuasion, that it derives its efficacy from the sanctity of places. Jesus represented the Father of the universe as every where present, and as ready to hear every worshipper that worships him in spirit and in truth: He fixed no limitations as to place or situation.

His practice was consistent with what he taught. In a great variety of places we find him employed in acts of public worship; sometimes he assembled his hearers on a mountain, sometimes by the sea-side, sometimes in a ship, and often in private houses. On these occasions he performed acts of religious worship, but among these acts, the rite of consecration is not to be found. Often he met with his audience in the temple. Should it be alledged that this was consecrated to his hand; I add, that much oftner he taught them in the synagogues which were not consecrated. But did he supply this defect? Did he hal-

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John iv. 21. † John iv. 23.

low these last for the purpose of sanctifying the worship he performed in them? Did he consecrate the house in which he instituted the sacrament of the supper? Our church, by way of eminence, calls this a great and an excellent mystery; then it might have been expected, that Jesus would, at least, have consecrated the house in which it was to be celebrated. Yet we find, that great and excellent as this mystery was, the house in which he and the disciples met on this occasion, was no more consecrated than the house in which I am now writing. If this rite was necessary, or even decent, can we suppose that Jesus would have omitted it? Was he less concerned about the requisites of public worship, than the Bishops of our church? We would be almost tempted to think this was their opinion; if it is not their opinion: Upon what do they found their rite? It is a perfect novelty, compared with the practice of Jesus. It is truly amazing, that this should not have occurred to them. You may now be convinced, that the practice of Christ is as unfavourable to their consecration rite, as his doctrine.

But I must next observe, that it is utterly reprobated by a declaration he made, extending to the whole christian world. "WHERE TWO OR THREE ARE GATHERED TOGETHER IN MY NAME, THERE AM I IN THE MIDST OF THEM*." The declaration of our priesthood runs in a very different stile; were two or three thousand met in their churches, Christ will not be in the midst of them, unless first consecrated by Bishops. Yet, according to his promise, wherever, through the wide extended universe, two or three meet in his name,
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* Matth. xviii. 20.

he will bless them with his presence. Upon this CHARTER we found our acts of public worship; and with pity and contempt we reject the foppery of human inventions; foppery is indeed but a soft name for practices that would narrow the enlarged liberal plan, upon which Christ himself hath established the acceptance of Divine worship.

I must be excused if here I use some liberty with our Service Book. It ought not to be taken amiss, for in that book great liberty is taken with this promise made by Jesus to the christian world. In place of WHERE two or three are gathered together, as you have it very justly translated in your Bible. They make their book say, "WHEN two or three are gathered, &c." For the truth of this, I refer you to the conclusion of their morning and evening prayers in the Liturgy. Whether this proceeded from neglect or design, I will not pretend to say; but one thing is obvious, by substituting *when* in place of *where*, the promise becomes not inconsistent with the pretension, that in their consecrated churches only, God could be acceptably worshipped. But by retaining the word WHERE, then two or three worshippers, met in the name of JESUS, constituted a christian church, independent of consecration or any rite whatever.

From what has been said, I hope it is obvious, that our church consecrations have no warrant either from the teaching, or practice of Christ; on the contrary, they appear to be absolutely inconsistent with both, and utterly repugnant to that simplicity of worship he enjoined.

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It may be possibly alleged, that Jesus had no occasion to practise this rite, as during his ministry, he planted no particular churches; that as he had selected others, who, after his ascension, were to be employed in this important work, it is to be presumed, that the consecration of their churches was among the instructions he left with them. It must be truly surprizing if it was, considering, what he had previously taught them concerning the nature and acceptance of Divine worship.

Let us however pay all due regard to this supposition, by enquiring how it is supported.

We find that twelve disciples were sent forth at one time, and a little after, seventy more, invested with a commission to preach the gospel. The infinite importance of the charge rendered it absolutely necessary, that previous to this going forth, they should be fully instructed in the nature and extent of their commission. As their practice was to become an example to after-ages, it was highly expedient that Jesus should be explicit with them. He was so in the fullest manner. The commission to the twelve, you have in the 10th of St. Matthew; that given to the seventy, in the 10th of St. Luke. In substance they were the same. They were ordered to go into towns and cities, and into such houses as would receive them, and preach the kingdom of Heaven. The manner also in which they were to conduct themselves, both with regard to those who should receive, and those who should reject them, he also describes. In a word, their commission comprehended, and very clearly expressed, every particular necessary

cessary to the trust with which they were charged : But in that commission, do we find an appointment for consecrating places of worship ? No, not a sentence to that purpose, not a hint that will bear a construction that points at it. Yet surely, if such a rite was to be of necessary observance in the christian church, this was the time for its being expressly appointed. These men, by the authority committed to them, were to plant a variety of churches in different parts of the world. Nothing can be more unaccountable, than that Jesus should give them no information about this rite, if the worship they were to perform, was to find no acceptance without it, or if even the want of it, would render it in any measure defective. Jesus certainly instructed his disciples in all the requisites essential to worship ; and as this rite is not to be found among these he taught, we must conclude, that it is not of his appointment.

Let us next enquire if these TEACHERS he sent forth, did of themselves afterwards introduce it.

Soon after the ascension of their Lord, they were qualified, by the promised effusion of the Holy Ghost, for the full execution of that important trust committed to their charge. Both to Jews and Gentiles, they preached in the name of Jesus, and, for the purpose of spreading his religion, they separated ; took different roads ; formed christian societies ; appointed teachers, and, as circumstances permitted, they revisited these infant seminaries of the christian faith.

In the acts of the apostles, we have an account of the places in which they assembled for public worship.

ship. Their first meeting was at Jerusalem in an upper room*. Their next was, probably, in the same house†. Then we are told that daily in the temple, and in every house they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ‡. Peter preached to a congregation in the house of Cornelius§. At Thessalonica and Berea, Paul taught in the synagogues||. At Corinth, in the house of Justus, where he continued a year and six months¶. At Ephesus, in the school of Tyrannus§§. At Troas he taught in an upper chamber¶. And for two whole years he preached, no man forbidding him, in his own hired house at Rome|||. And in the same city he had a church in the house of Aquila and Priscilla**. These are among the principal places in which the apostles assembled for the purpose of worship. Do we find that in all, or in any of them, they performed this consecration rite? I have referred you to chapter and verse,* that you may judge for yourself, whether any thing is expressed or implied, in text or context, from which it can be inferred, that they did consecrate the houses in which they worshipped. No, were you to accompany them through the whole of their travels, from the date of their commission, to the expiration of their lives, you would find in their practice no rite similar to our modern consecration, nothing, that in name, or in kind, bears the least affinity to it. And as they themselves observed no such rite, so they gave no instructions about

* Acts i. 13, 14. † Acts ii. 1. ‡ Acts v. 42.
 § Acts x. || Acts xvii. 1, 10. † Acts xviii. 7, 11.
 §§ Acts xix. 9. ¶ Acts xi. 6. ||| Acts xxviii. 30, 31.
 ** Rom. xvi. 5.

about it to these elders, presbyters or Bishops whom they appointed to superintend the churches they had planted; not one word concerning this rite is to be found in the epistles they addressed to them. The thought that struck the preacher, seems never to have occurred to them, that it would tend to impress an audience with religious awe. On the contrary, they taught, this could arise only from just sentiments of God impressed upon the soul. They never thought of borrowing assistance from consecrated walls and altars, to excite devotion in their hearers. This their master and they laboured to awaken, by representing the great object of worship as a spirit; and as pleased with that worship only, which was offered to him in spirit and in truth.

It now, I hope, fully appears to you, that this rite of church consecration, hath neither a precept, nor an example in the gospel to authorise it; not one word is to be found concerning it in the New Testament, not a hint from which it can be inferred. On the contrary, all ideas of local sanctity are most pointedly condemned and reprobated by the doctrine and practice of Christ and his apostles. They constantly taught, that worship was to derive its value and acceptance, not from the place of the worshippers, but entirely from the temper of their minds. "The time is now come, when God is to be worshipped, neither on mount *Gerizim*, nor yet at *Jerusalem*; the hour now is, when the true worshippers, must worship the Father in spirit and in truth." No reservation is made in favour of consecrated temples, churches or chappels. Where two or three are gathered together in the name of Christ, he will be in the midst of them.

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Here we might close the argument ; for I judge it quite unnecessary to follow the preacher one step beyond his Bible. If his rite can find no warrant there, authorities foreign to it, will do him but little service ; for upon such authorities, he might bring all the superstitions of a *Heathen* or *Romish church* into his own. I shall accompany him however the full length he went for his proofs.

You tell me that he carried the attention of his audience to the contemplation of an argument so long after the apostolic age, as the time of *Constantine*. He told his hearers, that this emperor consecrated a church he built over our Saviour's sepulchre at *Jerusalem* ; and indeed *Eusebius*, who assisted upon that occasion, gives us a very pompous description of the service. We have therefore no right to question the fact ; but we have a right to put the question, Whence did Constantine derive his authority for this consecration ? I have shewn you, that it could not be from Christ or his apostles ; nor from any precept or example recorded in the New Testament. But it will be urged, that it was handed down to him from their immediate successors. Let us then suppose, that during the period between the apostolic age and that in which this emperor lived, consecrations obtained, and had been in every respect what they now are. Can your Preacher, can any rational thinking being acquiesce in these precedents, as evidence, that local consecrations are of Divine appointment ? What is it to you, to me, or any man, what the more early ages of the christian church might think, teach or practise, with regard to this matter. They indeed lived
nearer

nearer to the apostolic times than we ; but have we not as near an access to the oracles of truth as they had ? Their practice can be no standard for us. The gospel was the only rule to them, as it is to us, and to the whole christian world to the end of time.

You must here indulge me with a short digression.

Nothing, perhaps, has contributed more to corrupt and perplex the religion of Jesus, than that excessive veneration which after-ages entertained for the FATHERS. Many of them indeed were valuable men, yet this will never justify that implicit submission to their authority, which is due only to the scriptures themselves. But so far hath this been carried, that the authority of the Fathers hath been oftener employed to determine what scripture was, than scripture to determine the propriety and soundness of what they wrote. For the solution of all questions relating to apostolic practices, each party appealed, not to the Bible, but to the Fathers ; and, as might of course be expected, that party, which, by successfully ransacking the *Fathers*, collected from their writings the greatest number of *quotations* in favour of any controverted point, was deemed to carry the victory. This is amazing, indeed ! christian enquirers consult the *compositions* of the *Fathers* in preference to the *Scriptures* of Christ and his apostles, which, being given by the inspiration of God himself, are left an universal and infallible standard and guide to the christian church. It doth not appear, that the apostles left any thing to the conveyance of oral tradition ; all was committed to writing ; so that those who lived a thousand years after their time, had the same advantage of knowing both their doctrine and practice, as those who

immediately succeeded them. Had men in every age availed themselves of this advantage common to all, and, on every subject, had they directly appealed to scripture, as the only standard; had they acquiesced in what was clear, and allowed a liberty of opinion in what was not; the history of the christian church had never been disgraced and bloated with those fierce and foul contentions, which have so often shaken the peace of the world, and introduced the worst of human evils, the *tyranny of priestcraft*. But unhappily, neglecting the word of God, and looking at nothing beyond the traditions of men, instead of adjusting the controversies in hand, they only gave birth to a thousand more, and widened the breaches they proposed to close.

But there is, sir, another circumstance which ought to create no small diffidence of the ancient Fathers of the church; it should indeed be remarked with great allowance, it is no easy matter to shake off early acquired prepossessions. From the violence of their enemies, they were obliged to take the field in defence of their faith. The gospel furnished them with arguments unanswerable, and every way sufficient to support its credit; but they unhappily thought of borrowing that assistance from others, which the gospel utterly disclaimed. Justin, Theophilus of Antioch, Clement of Alex. and Lactantius introduced the Sybilline oracles in vindication and support of the christian faith; they insisted upon them, they urged and they quoted them with the same confidence as they did the predictions of the old Jewish prophets. Had their enemies known how to have availed themselves of this mistaken zeal, what an easy triumph might they not have gained?

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But the cause, through the ignorance of its friends, was carried off the ground that would have supported, and will support it, in all its dignity and importance, till the end of time. By grasping at illusive shadows, they lost the advantage of the solid ground; and their weakness endangered that cause, which their zeal meant to support.

The truth is, these men were deeply tainted with the superstitions of the times.----upon their conversion to the gospel, in place of renouncing, they laboured to accomodate many things in the old, to the new religion they had embraced. It is not be wondered at. The earlier and long accustomed occupations of the mind, insensibly create such a predilection in their favour, that they are not easily shaken off; nay, when we think they are dismissed, they will imperceptibly affect our sentiments, and in some degree continue, at least for a time, to influence the mind in any direction it may take. Whoever will attend to the manner and conduct of the more early converts to the christian faith, will readily perceive the truth of these observations. The Jewish christians were exceedingly prone to blend the law with the gospel. Though the last became their choice, yet they were unwilling altogether to relinquish the first. The converted Gentiles, from a similar propensity, introduced some of their old rites into their new profession; while the more learned and speculative, corrupted the simplicity of the gospel, by incorporating with it the doctrines of philosophy. I might illustrate this last remark by a variety of instances, but I shall trouble you only with a few.

Platonism was the first philosophical system, that

made its way into the religion of Jesus. It was revived about the middle of the second century, by *Ammonius Saccas*, a christian father. With the doctrine of *Plato*, he associated the tenets of all other sects philosophical and religious. To this monstrous coalition of heterogeneous principles, he gave the name of **THE UNIVERSAL PHILOSOPHY**. He maintained, That the doctrines of the gospel were to be illustrated and explained by the principles of this wild incoherent system. The scheme was embraced with avidity, by almost all the christian fathers, in particular, by *Origen*, who supported it with all his credit; and at this time his authority was sufficient to give a sanction to any innovation he might embrace. This species of philosophy, revived by *Ammonius*, and patronised by *Origen*, was set up as an infallible standard, by which the gospel was to be explained; and the explanations given, were of a piece with the source from which they were derived, full of mystery and wild speculation.---As this philosophy gave full scope to all the powers of imagination, they were indulged to the very utmost stretch. The native simplicity of the gospel utterly disappeared. Its *doctrines* became unintelligible, and its *precepts* were perverted. The first were so interpreted, as to countenance the most extravagant absurdities concerning the Deity, the nature of the human soul, the empire of providence, and the agency of *Dæmons*. The latter were represented as enjoining a total abstraction from the world; as teaching, that hunger, thirst, and macerations of the body, were the only preparation for the celestial region. To this austere discipline, they added the pretended art of so purifying the intellectual faculty, as to render it capable of perceiving *Dæmons*, and of performing

ing marvellous things by their assistance. This was the philosophy which was first incorporated into the gospel, and I leave you to judge what advantage it was likely to derive from the alliance.

The Platonic system maintained its credit till the beginning of the fifth century, when the philosophy of Aristotle gained the ascendant. As the doctrines of the Stagyrte excluded from the universe a Divine providence, and insinuated the mortality of the human soul, his philosophy portended no good to the christian faith, in the explication of which it was now to be employed. The religion of Jesus was carried from one extreme just into the opposite. It was reduced by Platonism, to a meer idle speculation. By the philosophy of Aristotle, it was converted into a subject of perpetual disputation; new doctrines, subtle distinctions, captious sophisms, and inexplicable terms now engaged the attention of the whole christian world. So rapid was the progress which this philosophy made, that in the sixth century, it acquired an unrivalled empire over the minds of men. They obscured the genuine evidences of religion, erected a philosophy upon the ruins of common sense, and reared up an enormous mass of unintelligible doctrines, in which words passed for ideas, and sound for sense. From this period, ignorance began to establish her empire over the world; she continued to expand the enlarging cloud, till mankind was involved in the grossest superstition and absurdities. From the sixth, to the fourteenth century, the human race seem, in matters of religion, to have surrendered up to the priesthood all their powers, intellectual and moral. The priesthood indeed, were not much more intelligent than the people, but the former

former were ambitious, and the latter passive; the one yielded, the other encroached, and the world was threatened with a long night of thick darkness. About the year 1050 this darkness seemed to be tinged with some rays of light, which promised the return of day. But alas! the philosophy of Aristotle, almost lost in that ignorance it had introduced, once more, was unhappily revived. A Latin version of his commentaries, got into the West, was read with eagerness, and his philosophy was again employed to explain and defend the christian faith. This mode of illustration was embraced with the same rapture with which it had been cherished five ages before, and was, if possible, carried to a greater degree of extravagance. From this time almost to the reformation, the doctors of the christian church continued to reason themselves, not only out of the religion of Jesus, but even out of the reason of their own minds.

From this digression, you will readily perceive how little we can, or ought to depend upon fathers, philosophers, or any names however venerable for their antiquity or erudition. We may peruse their works with what pleasure we can, but in matters of religion, we can place no confidence in their authority. I therefore conclude my digression, with the observation that occasioned it, That nothing has proved so detrimental to the religion of Jesus, as that implicit deference which, in after ages, was payed to the early philosophers and fathers of the christian church. By obstructing rational enquiry, it established the corruptions which they had unhappily introduced, and proved the cause of more being still added to the number. The same disposition of mind
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that adopted the absurdities which prevailed, could not fail of giving birth to others equally pernicious to the truth and simplicity of the gospel.

These reflections may sufficiently illustrate the danger of appealing to human authority in matters of religion. In every age, the former hath been found to introduce perplexity, confusion and darkness into the latter; and to establish claims destructive of happiness, and fatal to the sacred rights of conscience. Whoever is in the least acquainted with the history of the church, will find, that every page of it confirms the truth of these observations.

But to return to our subject. As the preceding remarks were purely intended to expose the absurdity of urging human authority in matters either of faith or practice, I now infer, That should *Constantine* have found a thousand instances of church consecration in the period between the apostolic age and his own, they could give no authority to the consecration of his church at Jerusalem. But I shall now shew you, that he had not so much as one precedent to countenance his practice.

Christ and his apostles, as we have had occasion already to remark, did not consecrate their places of worship. This rite was countenanced neither by their precept nor example. The christians of the second and third age, held their meetings in private houses, in caves, in burial places, and wherever, without disturbance, they could call upon the name of God. *Lucian*, who lived about the 180th year of the christian *Æra*, makes exceedingly merry with their places of worship; the entrance

trance to them he compares to *Homer's* description of the gates of hell. *. Secrecy and concealment were the circumstances that determined their choice of the place. The virulence of their enemies will account for this. But as they could worship in secret, might they not have consecrated in secret also? We are sure that they practised the first, but not one hint occurs, that they ever thought of the other. Nay, they went into the opposite extreme; in place of consecrating churches, they declaimed against churches themselves: "Every place, saith the Bishop of *Alexandria*, a field, a wilderness, a ship, an inn, a prison, is a place of religious worship unto us †." And saith Clemens Alexandrinus, "He that is indued with knowledge, honors God, neither in a determinate place, nor in a select temple, nor on stated festivals, but through his whole life, and in every place. Such a one is he, who believes God to be every where present, and doth not suppose him to be shut up in determinate places ‡." And saith Hillary, "Take heed of antichrist, for you are unhappily fond of walls; ye foolishly reverence the church of God in material buildings; ye press the name of peace under pretence of these. Is it any matter of doubt to you, that antichrist is to sit in them §."

The contempt which the christians of this early period entertained for material structures, exposed them to abundance of raillery. Cecilius called upon them to give a reason, why they had no temples, no altars, no images?-----To which Minilius Telir made this

* Luc. de Philopatr. † Euseb. vii. 22. ‡ Strom. vii. § Hillar. contr. Arien. and Aufen.

this noble reply, "What temple can I build to him
 "whom the whole world, formed by his power, can-
 "not contain? And since I, a man, dwell more at
 "large, shall I include so great a majesty within
 "the walls of a house? Is he not better dedicated
 "in our minds; is he not better consecrated in our
 "hearts?" To the same objection urged by Cel-
 sus, Origen thus replies, "A devout heart is our
 "temple; we decline building inanimate and dead
 "temples to the author of all life †." I might mul-
 tiply quotations from this age of the christian church,
 all breathing the same spirit with the above. So
 far were they from consecrating their places of
 worship, that they did not consider them as of the
 least importance to worship at all. Rather than
 depart from the simplicity they observed, they pa-
 tiently submitted to the ridicule of their adver-
 saries. From this circumstance, we are furnished
 with double evidence, that the consecration rite
 was not practised in this early age of the church.
 Heathen writers reproached the christians for their
 contempt of material structures; the christian writers
 gloried in the reproach. It may be thought, perhaps,
 the latter carried the aversion they entertained to fix-
 ed places of worship to an extraordinary length.
 Whatever may have been in this, it clearly demon-
 strates, that local consecrations were utterly disclaim-
 ed by the christians of this period; and you may chal-
 lenge your preacher to produce you one single in-
 stance of this practice for three hundred years and
 upwards after the christian Æra. The truth is, the
 consecration of *Constantine's* church at *Jerusalem*, is
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* Min. Felix page 29, 94. † Orig. contr. Cel.
 viii. 6.

the first thing of the kind that we meet with. Infected as the philosophers and fathers of that period may have been with the superstitions of the age, it doth not appear, that such a rite ever occurred to their imagination. It was to derive its birth from the fantastic splendor of after-times.

Upon the conversion of Constantine, the christian church breaking through the cloud that had hitherto obscured it, shone forth with amazing brightness: The transition was sudden and unexpected. The emperor, to testify the sincerity of his conversion, and his zeal for the new faith, dispatched edicts every where in favour of the christian cause, and though he granted an universal toleration, yet he threw every advantage on the side of christianity: He distinguished its teachers with peculiar marks of his grace and favour; honoured their councils with his presence, and in almost every city of the empire, erected magnificent temples for christian worship. This amazing revolution, saith Eusebius, "transported the christians with inexpressible joy, and a divine air of cheerfulness beamed on every countenance. They were entertained in the most delightful manner with consecrations of new built oratories, and with festivals of dedications in every city. The religious performances of the rulers, the sacred ministrations of the priests, the rites of the church were compleat. One divine spirit, one soul, and the same cheerfulness of faith inspired them all *." What a mighty change and how sudden? But alas! the splendor which the gospel acquired, and the elevation to which its ministers were raised by this unexpected

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* Euseb. Eccl. Hist. x. 3.

revolution, proved the unhappy source of almost all the corruptions with which, in after ages, the church was infected. From the date of this very consecration, which your preacher insisted upon in support of this rite, the pure religion of Jesus became gradually obscured ; and, for ten centuries, continued to sink under the enormous load of superstitions, which, from from age to age were heaped upon it ; and as you may remark from the sequel, the whole train originated in Constantine's pompous dedication at Jerusalem. He is not, indeed, to be charged with all the abominable practices afterwards introduced into consecrations ; but he furnished the idea on which succeeding priesthoods largely improved.

From the history of religion, how many lessons of humility may we not be taught ?----The followers of Jesus had but a little time before, in the strongest terms expressed their aversion to temples, churches and altars ; with raptures they had embraced their caverns and dormitories, and even desarts and prisons, as better suited to the simplicity of worship than magnificent structures, with the want of which they were reproached---But no sooner did the effulgence of imperial majesty beam upon their cause, than their sentiments ran with violence into the opposite extreme ; then stately temples and pompous consecrations became necessary to the acceptance of worship ; and the Almighty, for whose presence they had represented the world as too circumscribed, could be worshipped *only* in houses made with men's hands.----The splendor which arose upon the church, with the conversion of Constantine, seems to have obliterated all former ideas, and to have

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produced

produced an entire revolution of sentiment, with regard to the places and requisites of religious worship.

You may possibly think, that there must have been something peculiarly enchanting in this first consecration, that will account for this amazing revolution in the sentiments of the christian church—I shall give you such a description of it, as indeed will suit the brevity of a letter, but which will by no means express the pompousness of the service.

The emperor, by letters addressed to the Bishops of almost every province, commanded their attendance at Jerusalem. Thither they repaired accompanied with vast multitudes of people. They were directed to consecrate his church. They performed the service with a dexterity, scarcely to be credited, if we consider that this was the first service of the kind in which they had ever been employed, and even the first christian church that ever had been consecrated. They seem, however, to have been entirely acquainted with their respective parts. "Some prayed, some preached, some pronounced "panegyrick orations on the emperor's magnificence, "and some implored the favour of God by unbloody "sacrifices, and mystical sacred actions *."-----*Eusebius* recites the part which he himself performed on the occasion. "He adorned the solemnity of dedication, one while, by describing the magnificence of the building, another while, by applying the prophetic oracles to the present figures and "images †." The building he calls the city of God, the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of truth. "What king, saith he, hath filled all "places,

* *Euseb. di Vit. Const. iv. 45.* † *De vit. Const. iv. 5.*

" places, countries and cities of the Greeks and
 " Barbarians, with his royal palaces *and consecrations*
 " *of divine temples* ? ---Such are the most beautiful
 " ornaments and gifts of this temple, which indeed
 " are of themselves august, and truly great,
 " worthy of astonishment and admiration. They are
 " an illustrious specimen of the Redeemer's kingdom.
 " The prophecy is now fulfilled, which foretold,
 " that the glory of the latter house, should be
 " greater than that of the former. The work"
 " continues he, " is truly wonderful, but the wonder
 " of wonders is the original figures, and first
 " intellectual images, and divine exemplars, I mean
 " the restoration of the divine and rational building
 " in our souls" ---Then he proceeds to describe
 " the great porch of Constantine's church, as
 " representing God the Father, the secondary lights to
 " signify Jesus Christ, the thrones and seats of the
 " church to be expressive of the Holy Ghost residing
 " by his several gifts in the hearts of the faithful *.

These are but a few out-lines of the service.
 For more particular information, I must refer you
 to the famous panegyrick pronounced on that occasion.
 You will find nothing like it in the annals of
 history. The consecrators seem to have set all sense,
 reason and religion at open defiance, and to have
 vied with each other, who should carry the most servile
 adulation, and most shocking impieties to the
 greatest height.

We might think that this exhibition, instead of exciting
 admiration in the followers of Jesus, would have proved
 so exceedingly offensive to their sentiments,

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that

* Eccl. Hist. x. 4. Orat. panegy.

that its repugnancy to their former mode of worship, would have occasioned an immediate revolt against the practice; at least, that the simplicity by which they had been hitherto distinguished, would have rendered a transition into the opposite extreme a work of time and labour. But alas! the magnificence and splendor, with which, on this occasion, they were entertained, so entirely possessed their imagination, that no leisure was left for reflection. Their minds were so occupied with the pomp of this extraordinary scene, that they considered not how inconsistent it was with the simplicity of the gospel, nor thought of these corruptions, to which in after ages it might give rise. This universal joy, to which the conversion of Constantine gave birth, was not a season for the calmer dictates of reason to be heard. The followers of Jesus, breaking through a long night of obscurity, eagerly grasped at the shadows of human splendor, and with raptures embraced an alliance with the powers of this world.

They were left no time to recollect their fatal mistake, consecrations multiplied upon them in every quarter. The edicts of the emperor were regarded as the voice of heaven. At his command, with joy and precipitation they hastened to consecrate his churches at Constantinople and at Antioch, as well as this at Jerusalem; in the latter place he erected other temples besides this one over the sepulchre of Jesus, in particular, one in honor of the salutiferous cross, and others over certain mystical caves*. Your preacher might have added these as very decent auxiliaries to his cause.

But the question still recurs, whence did Constantine

* Euseb. Panegy. Hist. 10.

fine derive his idea of church consecration ? not from the gospel, as you must have already perceived, neither are we to suppose that it was a mere invention of his own.

The truth is, he was furnished with the idea, and borrowed the practice from the idolatrous customs of Heathenism, the religion he lately professed. For it must indeed be allowed, that consecrations did very universally obtain throughout the Pagan world. The Roman people seem to have been peculiarly fond of them ; from the consecration of their first temple by *Romulus* to *Jupiter Feretrius*, to this one performed by Constantine at Jerusalem, they continued the practice ; and so much faith had they in the efficacy of the rite, that they consecrated almost every thing ; not only their temples and places of worship, but the sepulchres of their dead, and even the dead themselves. They extended the practice to their palaces, their senate house, the walls of their cities, and even to private dwellings, and public roads. There was something infinitely more generous in this proceeding of the Heathen priesthood, than is to be found in the modern practice, which confines all the benefits of this holy rite to churches and church-yards alone. If you have any curiosity to see a Pagan form of consecration, you will find an exceeding good one in the fourth book of *Tacitus's* history.

Having shown you that the rite of church consecration hath no foundation in the old law ; that it is utterly disclaimed by the gospel ; that it was unknown for the three first centuries, that the first instance of the

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kind,

▪ Euseb. de Laud. Const. Ch. 9.

kind, was this of Constantine, and that it was borrowed from similar practices in the heathen world—I would now solicit your attention to that hideous train of superstitions which it carried along with it in its cloudy progress. And from the short representation which follows, I shall leave you to determine, whether any one rite hath proved more fatal to the interests of true religion, than this of church consecration, which your Preacher undertook to prove to be of Divine original.

No sooner had Constantine built and consecrated his churches, than he ransacked the world for the bones of the martyrs, that he might have them deposited in his sacred temples. He did St. Andrew, Luke and Timothy, the honour of translating their relics to his church at Constantinople. Sometime after this, Arcadius disturbed the ashes of Samuel, and ordered them to be brought from Judea, where they had rested near 1500 years, that they might be interred in some consecrated ground in Thrace—The graves of the apostles and martyrs were searched for with a zeal, equalled only by the extravagance of joy with which their ashes were transported to holy ground. The relics were carried to the places appointed for their reception, accompanied with processions that were amazingly splendid—and that their churches might be rendered worthy of these new inhabitants, they were illuminated day and night with wax tapers. You may see how quickly our consecration charm began to operate, and what a powerful auxiliary superstition was likely to find in it, for extending her empire over the world.—

Pilgrimages were the next species of fanaticism to which it gave rise. Numbers from every quarter flocked to Jerusalem, to attend the consecration of Constantine's church, and it may be supposed, that this first visit might be owing more to curiosity than devotion; yet the passion a little after became abundantly serious. No sooner was it known that the bones of the holy martyrs were deposited in the consecrated ground of the temples, than incredible numbers set out for Palestine, upon the pious design of kissing the holy dust in which they were lodged. Various were the rites they performed in honor of these relicks, and many were the wonderful virtues which in return they are supposed to have derived from them. As these pilgrimages were accounted expressive of the sublimest devotion, their credit continued to rise. Furious enthusiasm kindling from one stage to another, at last broke forth into the most dreadful frenzy that ever seized the human race, and excited a rage in the western world, which vowed the utter destruction of the eastern, and which in the event, almost proved the desolation of both. HOLY LAND gave rise to the dreadful contention. ---These simpler pilgrimages which preceded that madness into which they afterwards arose, were performed with no other view, but to express a religious veneration for the relicks of holy men, and to obtain blessings by their mediation with Heaven. Some of the devotees, it must be confessed, turned their pilgrimage to a very good account. Upon their return; they had for sale great quantities of holy dust, holy bones, and a variety of other relicks, for which they found a ready market*. The monks were

* August. de Civ. Dei. lib. 22. Ch. 8.

were exceedingly dexterous in this business; with amazing effrontery, they sold their fictitious relics, and to enhance their value, exhibited to the people their efficacy, by pretended combats with evil spirits, in which, they were always sure to overcome. These pilgrimages, out of which all this superstition and madness arose, issued from the consecration at Jerusalem as their genuine source.

But you are next to observe, that as this rite suggested the idea of collecting the bones of the saints into the places it had rendered holy, so it also introduced the practice of invoking their propitious mediation with God-----From the honors their votaries payed to their dust, they had a right to expect their assistance above, and the same power of imagination, that could impress the belief of receiving virtues from their ashes, could not but persuade them, that still more might be expected from their spirits. It must indeed be confessed, that at the first they were somewhat at a loss how to introduce this new species of worship. However they soon hit upon the method; they first met in the places where their bones were deposited, and with great solemnity they celebrated their memories, and mutually exhorted one another to imitate their faith and patience. In this there was nothing reprehensible, yet it was a dangerous experiment, and soon proved to be so. From the fourth century all reserve was thrown aside, and the invocation of saints became an open and an avowed part of their religious service. From the Greek Liturgies of this age it appears, that the prayers and intercessions of the martyrs were regarded as highly beneficial to men. The great name and distinguished abilities of Jerom, gave

gave a sanction to saint worship. "We every where," saith he, "reverence the sepulchres of the martyrs, we fix our eyes on the sacred dust, and we kiss it." In the following ages, this species of devotion was carried to such a degree of extravagance, that by much the greatest part of worship was addressed to these supposed saints; scarce a prayer was offered up to Heaven, that was not presented in their names, and committed to their intercession. As the consecration rite, in the course of its operations, had introduced this new species of worship; and as the saints and martyrs were then converted into divinities, it became necessary to provide them with temples, images and altars; with these they were soon furnished in abundance. From this time, scarce was there a church built, that was not dedicated to some HE or SHE saint. Justinian erected several temples to the mother of God. St. Mary, St. Ann, St. Cyprian, &c. &c. had their churches also. And we read of altars erected to St. Philip, St. James, St. Simon, St. Jude, St. Gregory, St. Andrew. All of them also were represented by images, to which the most religious veneration was payed.

Besides the particular churches appropriated for the worship of each, it was thought becoming, that they should be furnished with a house sufficient for performing occasional solemnities in honor of them all. The resolution proved fatal to the gods and goddesses of the Pantheon. Though the latter could plead a right to this antient temple by possession for time immemorial, yet it was determined, that they should be expelled. This purpose was carried into execution about the beginning of the 7th century, and their old habitation was solemnly consecrated a-

new

new for the residence of St. Mary and all saints. We are told, that before the consecration was performed, such christians as ventured to enter this temple, were smitten by devils, but that no such dismal accident ever befel them, after the due celebration of this rite *.

This deifying work went on at a strange rate; new objects of worship were still added to the list. But as it does not ly much in the line of my present enquiry, I shall not trouble you with the catalogue of the male and female divinities, which the church made from the middle of the fourth, to the close of the tenth century; not that the catalogues were then closed, but at this period they seem to have been most amply provided. "The celestial courts," saith the learned and judicious Mosheim, "were filled with new legions of beings, many of which had no existence but in the imagination of their deluded worshippers." And adds, "That if a man had but an austere countenance, or an enthusiastic imagination, he was sure after death to be canonized, and worshipped as a god †." If you are curious to know who these divinities were, while in their mortal state, I can only refer you to the Kalendar of our English Service Book, where you will find many of their names.

As the objects of devotion multiplied, so did the places of worship, and of course, consecrations also. With regard to these last, it is natural to suppose, that, by the demand that was for them, they must have received many curious improvements; in fact they did so. Constantine's consecration was a simple affair,

* Præmonst. Cent i. † Mosh. Cent. x. Ch. 3.

affair, compared with those that followed. In latter times, the priesthood found it necessary to consecrate water, oil, salt and ashes, that with these again, they might consecrate churches, cæmetaries, altars, bells, dishes, pulpits, fonts, candlesticks, crosses, &c. Were I to describe the additional splendours which this rite received from the infallible heads of the Romish church; were I to represent the shocking impieties, and abominable delusions, to which it gave rise under the management of that abandoned priesthood, I know not which would most excite your astonishment, the sottishness of the people, or the effrontery of their clergy; we might be almost tempted to think that the latter had been trying to what depths of stupidity, they could sink the former. The deluded multitude, once impressed with the belief, that their priests were invested with the power of infusing spiritual virtues into material substances, would very naturally infer, that with the same facility, they could communicate similar virtues to them. The persuasion took; and in what manner the priests availed themselves of this deplorable stupidity, let the history of their church bear witness. The imaginations of the people were so thoroughly impressed with a belief in the efficacy of consecrations, that a consecrated bone, or a consecrated any thing, was considered as an infallible antidote against every evil, but especially against the agency of Dæmons and malignant spirits. They were sought after with an eagerness, suited to their imagined importance, and no price was thought too high for the purchase.

But I am unwilling to trouble you with a further detail of the abominations which this rite introduced from one stage of its progress into another; though

though originally a shoot transplanted from an idolatrous soil, yet you see, how luxuriantly it throve in the christian church, from the abundant care of the priesthood to nourish and rear it up.

As if dissident however of all their former labours, by a new fetch, they undertook to put the divinity of the rite beyond all question. It was unnecessary ; for the people had before proved as credulous, as the priests could have wished them. To their own authority, however, they superadded that of celestial consecrators.

They tell us, that the consecration of Westminster church was, in the year 604, performed by a person of no less dignity than St. Peter.

The night preceding the consecration, he was wafted over the Thames in a fisherman's boat, the church, immediately upon his entering it, became illuminated, as if night had been turned into day ; he was attended with a multitude of heavenly beings ; having finished the consecration service, he made himself known to the fisherman, " I am Peter, saith " he, that speaks unto thee, tell the Bishop what " thou hast seen, and that I have already consecrated " this church, and for the veracity of your report, " you may appeal to the impressions I have made " upon the walls *." The Bishop found the fisherman's report to be true, upon entering the church ; he discovered that its walls were in twelve places anointed with the oil of consecration, he saw the remains of twelve wax candles, stuck in twelve crosses, and all things moist with the sprinkling of holy water.

* Usher de Brit. eccl. prim. cap.

water. The Bishop and his attendants having observed all these indubitable marks of St. Peter's consecration, blessed God and gave thanks*.

I could furnish you with many instances of celestial consecrations, but I shall add only one more.

About the year 640, certain Bishops were appointed by the Pope to consecrate St. Dennis's church near Paris. As they were on their way to execute their commission, they were accosted by a leper. He informed them, "That he had watched there the night before, and that he had seen JESUS CHRIST, accompanied with a train of celestial spirits, consecrating this church, and that Jesus had commanded him to inform their lordships of what he had done. They received the information with all imaginable respect, returned back, not venturing to consecrate the church after Jesus Christ †." You may well believe, after these consecrations performed by St. Peter, the chief of the apostles, and by Jesus Christ himself in person, that their divine original was ascertained, as indubitably clear and certain. It is hard to say, of the opinions and practices that sprung from this rite, which were most extravagant. One thing you must have all along perceived, that from the first institution of it by Constantine, it continued to furnish the priesthood with every superstitious device, and delusive art, which they chose to practice upon the people.

Such was the cloud which this rite had drawn
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* Baron. Annal. ad A. D. 610. Sect. ii.

† Hospin de orig. Templ. iv. 2.

over the religion of Jesus, and the christian church. In its progress it always retained the complexion of its origin; no wonder, along with itself, it drew into the church a vast multitude of other heathenish customs, which with equal fondness were embraced by the priesthood, and had places assigned them in the christian ritual. Perhaps, you may be curious to know how this rite, originally translated from Paganism, and in its after progress so curiously embellished, found its way into the reformed churches of *England* and *Ireland*. I shall endeavour to give you what satisfaction I can upon this point.

At the Reformation, it was judged expedient to compromise matters with as much softness and lenity as was possible. Our rulers, in the pious hope of gaining over their brethren of the Romish church, retained as many of their rites as they decently could. With this view they composed a Service, of materials selected from the Mass Book, and studied to give it such a complexion, that those of the popish persuasion might almost take it for their own.

The innovations however, which this separation from the mother church was likely to produce, were deemed of too important a nature to be left to the arbitration of the priesthood. As the nation was just bursting through the servitude, and knocking off the chains of sacerdotal tyranny, there was abundant reason, to distrust the clergy in the new modelling of the church. And fortunate it was for the Reformation that their power was annihilated; for, to a man, the whole clerical body opposed it. They were unanimous for popery, and firm as a rock.

rock *. The King assumed the power that had been wrested from the Pope, and, in conjunction with the other branches of the legislature, claimed sole, undivided, supreme authority in matters of religion. By the Statute 25. Henry VIII, It was enacted and decreed. " 1st. That the convocation should from " thenceforth be assembled only by the king's writ. " 2dly. That it should make no *canons* or *constitu-* " *ons* but by virtue of the king's licence so to do. " 3dly. That having agreed on any *canons* or *consti-* " *tutions*, they should yet neither *publish* nor *exe-* " *cute* them without the king's *confirmation* of them. " Nor 4thly. By his *authority* execute any, but with " these limitations: That they be neither against " the king's *prerogative*, nor against any *common* or " *statute* law, nor finally, in any other respect con- " trary to the *customs* of the realm †."

On this foundation all power and authority ecclesiastic rests to this very day. In a word, the established episcopal church was wrought into its present form *entirely* by the *Crown* and *Parliament*.

By virtue of this supreme authority, injunctions, canons, constitutions and articles were issued forth, to which the clergy *were* and *are* commanded to give their unfeigned assent and consent. They must receive their rites and their faith from the magistrate; they are not permitted to dispute, much less to object. The king and his parliament may in-

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struct;

* See the Dissent. Gent. 3d Letter.
Dissent. Gent. Postscrip.

† See the

fruct, overrule and control all the Archbishops, Bishops and priests of the church, and direct them what they shall preach, and what prayers they shall use. Queen Elizabeth, in her ecclesiastic capacity, composed forms of prayer for her nobility, gentry, soldiers and sailors. In a word, every change, alteration or amendment in faith or worship, must come, and can come from the legislature only; the clergy may offer their advice if it is asked, but if it is not, they must be silent.—So that as often as you hear changes rung upon the power, authority and jurisdiction of the church; by the church you are to understand, the King, Lords and Commons. For, by the constitution, they are the indisputed fathers and governors of our modern christian church, the interpreters of religion to the clergy, and exercise the power of appointing rites, and settling controversies of faith, from which the clergy dare not recede.

I have rather rambled a little from the line of my present inquiry. It was however with a view, if possible, to exculpate our clergy from the charge of having introduced this consecration rite into our church. For if, like the other rites and ceremonies of the church, the form of consecration was drawn up and enjoined by the authority of the state, the clergy are to be pitied, rather than blamed. Having declared their assent and consent to all the injunctions of the magistrate, they are no doubt bound in *conscience* to perform this rite, as much as they are to absolve the dying from their sins, or to pray over the dead in the SURE AND CERTAIN *hope* of their resurrection to eternal life; which with many other

other *rites*, equally *decent* and *edifying*, are enjoined by the authority of the magistrate.

If the consecration of churches, chapels and burying ground, is enacted by the same uncontrollable authority, the blame doth not indeed fall so heavily on the *consecrators*, for it is scarce to be expected, that men will forfeit present emoluments, and ruin their future prospects by disputing points, where all disputes are vain.

But I must now confess, that after the most diligent search, I have not been able to find the rite of consecration among these forms enacted by the legislature. I have looked through the *Liturgy* again and again. I have applied to their *canons*, *constitutions* and *articles*, but can get no direction where the *authorised form* is to be found. The form to which I referred in the beginning of my letter, is indeed annexed to their Book of *Common Prayer*. Whose composition it is, or by whose direction it is placed there, I do not know: Only I can find no evidence that it was either framed, or appointed by legal authority; if it had, every Bishop would have been bound invariably to adhere to it. We never find them substituting rites of their own, in place of these ordained in the Book of *Common Prayer*; they always observe the forms authoritatively appointed for the communion, baptism, confirmation, matrimony, burying service, &c, &c. They sometimes do abridge, but never presume to add; at least if they do so, it is at their peril. The truth is, my LORDS the Bishops, have no power to add to the service, nor even to expunge, amend, or alter so much

as one single sentence in any rite, form, or office contained in their Service-book.

But with regard to the rite of church consecration, the same observations will not hold. For though that one to which I have referred, is prefaced, *A FORM OF CONSECRATION according to the use of the church of Ireland*; yet I do not find that in all cases it is the one observed. I am told, that sometimes the consecrating Bishop makes a form for himself. And indeed, this seems to have been pretty much the practice, from the first introduction of this edifying rite into our reformed episcopal churches. *Laud*, of pious memory, drew up a consecration form for *Creed church*. It was resented by the legislature. He was impeached, and tried for his insolence. He pleaded his cause from precedents; these of *Moses*, *Solomon* and *Constantine*. But they were found not to be in point.——Another form was published by Bishop *Sparrow* in the year 1672, though many years before, composed by Bishop *Andrews*. A third was produced by Mr. *Tisdal* in 1703, and another by the Bishop of Ely in the year following. The form used by your Bishop, I can well suppose, was different from all the preceding.

From these liberties that have been, and still are taken with this rite of church consecration, is it not clear and obvious, that it is founded, not upon legislative, but clerical authority; that is, upon no authority at all?

But let us see how our Bishops are to reconcile this additional rite made to their church service, with the
ACT

ACT OF UNIFORMITY. It expressly enacts,
 " That no form or order of common prayers, ad-
 " ministration of sacraments, rites or ceremonies,
 " shall be openly used in any church, chapel, &c.
 " other than what are prescribed, and appointed to
 " be read in and by the said book." That is, the
Book of Common Prayer.

Our Bishops, at every step by which they are raised to their elevation in the church, in the most solemn manner, repeatedly declare their assent and consent to this act; it runs through the articles and canons they have subscribed; besides, it is an act of the legislature to which, as subjects of the realm, they owe obedience.—How are they to reconcile the consecration rite, an invention purely of their own, with this act, which is the true and genuine foundation upon which the fabrick of their church rests. As Bishops, they ought to REVERE it, as subjects they ought to OBEY; yet neither gratitude nor allegiance, have been able to prove sufficient restraints upon their rage for consecrating earth, brick and mortar.

This is a most unlucky rite. Place it in what view you will, it cannot stand the eye of inquiry. If we search for it in our religion, it is not there— if in the acts of our legislature, it is not among them; and in no Protestant church is it practised, that I know of, but in that of *England* and this kingdom. Let our clergy think of its original and efficacy what they will, it is an insult to our religion, to our legislature, and to the common sense of mankind. The feeblest ray of reason must revolt at the idea of infusing sanctity into the walls and furniture of a church.

church. It is impossible for any understanding not entirely vitiated, and even mad with the intoxication of clerical powers, to have faith in the efficacy ascribed to it, or even to apprehend wherein its usefulness or decency consists. Every man who hath the advancement of rational religion at heart, must regard it with peculiar aversion, and consider it as calculated only to revive the monkish superstitions of former times. And indeed if our clergy can once bring us to believe that they are invested with the power of infusing holiness into walls, altars, pulpits, fonts and burying ground ; we will passively receive every after superstition they shall prepare for us, and from venerating the churches, even proceed to the extravagance of former ages, of adoring themselves. I am far from thinking that this is the end they propose by the practice of church consecration. Nay, I will suppose that it is with no other purpose but to promote the advancement of pure and genuine religion. We are at liberty however to examine how far their rite may contribute to this end.

This leads me to the remarks with which I proposed to close my letter, and you may, possibly, think it ought to have been closed much sooner. In this, I entirely agree with you, and therefore the following observations shall not be long.

To me it is a matter of indifference, which consecration form I make the subject of my remarks. All of them are abundantly replete with absurdities. I confine myself however, to the form annexed to our *Irish Prayer Book*, not only because I have referred to it, but because of all others, it is the
least

least exceptionable, though in the conclusion you may possibly think it absurd enough.

I shall confine my observations to the devotional part of the Service.

In the first place I observe, that these prayers imply, that the Almighty has promised to manifest his presence in their churches, in the same visible manner that he displayed it in the Jewish tabernacle and temple. This is a presumption utterly repugnant to the spirit of the gospel dispensation, which totally abrogated the Jewish ritual, and proclaimed to the world that the Almighty, with equal acceptance, might be worshipped in every place through the unbounded universe. From the death of Christ, the temple service was dissolved for ever, and the reasons upon which that local worship was founded, continued no longer to exist. But our modern consecration prayers suppose the very reverse, namely, that in a christian church the Almighty is to display his presence, after the same visible manner that he did in the temple at Jerusalem, for the truth of this, I appeal to the addresses offered to God in the consecration service. Out of many, I shall produce a few expressions, and leave you to judge, to which they will apply, whether to the Jewish temple, or a Christian church.

In the consecrating prayers are the following expressions :

“ Most gracious Lord, admit this place and house
 “ into a portion of thine inheritance for ever: Place
 “ thy mercy-seat among us also : Let thine eyes and
 “ thine

" thine ears be open towards this house night and
 " day: Let the dew of thy divine blessing abide
 " for ever upon this house: We humbly pray, by
 " the death and passion, by the resurrection and
 " ascension, by the glorious intercession of our Lord,
 " that thou wouldst vouchsafe to sanctify this house
 " to thy service, by the effusion of thy holiness
 " from above: Let the sun of righteousness for ever
 " shine here, and let the brightest illumination of
 " thy spirit fill this place with thy glorious presence."

Now if our Bishops will shew me, that God hath
 any where in the gospel promised to fill christian
 churches with such a presence as is here implored,
 I will give up the point.---By the words in which
 these petitions run, they supplicate the Almighty,
 that by a visible inhabitation of his glory, he
 would fill the material building which they conse-
 crate. The words will bear no other sense or
 construction. They are nearly the very same ex-
 pressions used by Solomon at the dedication of the
 temple. In the mouth of Solomon they were perfect-
 ly just and proper, because God had expressly de-
 clared that he would fill this house with his visible
 presence. He had authority for the expressions he
 used; they had sense and meaning in his prayer;
 but used in the consecration of a christian church,
 they have neither sense nor meaning; they are absurd
 and impious. They are supplications to the Al-
 mighty, that he would revive a mode of worship
 which he hath declared to be abolished for ever.---
 But our Bishops will have it otherwise, their church-
 es must be what the Jewish temple was, filled with
 the *Shechinah*, or visible presence of God. They sup-
 plicate and implore that he would fill their chapels
 and

and churches with his glorious presence, "that he would place his mercy-seat in them, and that his ears and eyes may be open towards them day and night."---But with what sense and propriety do our Bishops insist upon this? Was a promise ever made to the christian world, that can lead them to an expectation of this kind? Are not they themselves instructed by that religion which they profess, to teach to others, that local sanctity ceased for ever with the temple worship, and that, under the gospel, no place could be more holy than another?---Are not these addresses they borrow from Solomon's prayer, when applied to places of christian worship, gross perversions of scripture, and utterly inconsistent with the spirit of the gospel?

Having made these few remarks on the expressions quoted above; let us next attend to these which describe the operations which they implore the Divine presence to perform in their churches.

"*Here,*" in this church, "let the lapsed be restored---let the sick be cured---let the blind eyes and hearts be enlightened---*Here* let thy servants find a cure for all their wounds, a comfort for all their sorrows, a remedy for all their inconveniences, and that all who shall enter *this house* may obtain all their desires---Let thy eternal peace be to *this house*, and to them who in *this house* come to thee to be eased and refreshed."

You might be apt to think that **THIS HOUSE** was intended either for a Lazar house, or house of good entertainment for travellers. The sign post is abundantly inviting--- But let me ask our consecrators,

tors, what meaning they affix to these expressions ; Is it literal, or figurative ? If the latter, I fear that the sick, the blind and wounded, would not think themselves much relieved by the figurative cure ; if literal, I fear the church will not be able to produce many instances in which these objects in coming out of their churches, found themselves in a much better condition than when they entered them.—To be serious, let me ask our clergy, What reason have they to think that the mere circumstance of entering their churches, will be accompanied with these inestimable blessings.—Solomon ascribed no such virtues to the entering into the temple, though filled with the visible presence of God. Have not these expressions a manifest tendency to beget and foster superstition in the breasts of the people, and create a reliance, more on the sanctity of the building, than on that of their hearts ? Are they not of a kind with these practised upon the devotees of ancient times, who were wrought upon to believe, that if they would but approach the tombs of a martyr, and kiss his dust, or touch his bones, they would be infallibly secured against all evils temporal and spiritual. This efficacy, which our consecration rite ascribes to the entering the churches, wants nothing to plunge their votaries into all the gloom of superstition, but the same credulity that effected it before ; but, thanks to Heaven, the people have become somewhat wiser.

But to proceed. In this form of consecration, there are also the following supplications addressed to the Almighty. “ Depute thy holy angels to abide here, to defend thy servants, and to drive away all the power of the enemy : Here let the
“ power

“ power of *Satan* be lessened and destroyed: Let
 “ no unclean thing ever enter *here*: Drive from
 “ hence all sacriligious hands, all SUPERSTITI-
 “ OUS RITES, all prophane persons, all proud
 “ and unquiet schismaticks, all misbelieving here-
 “ ticks: Let not the powers of darkness come hi-
 “ ther: Let no corrupt air, and no corrupt commu-
 “ nication, no bloodshed, and no unclean action,
 “ ever pollute this place dedicated to thy holiness.”

If by the angels of their churches, they mean their Bishops, they have no occasion to address the Almighty for a deputation of them, as their churches are pretty well guarded by them already——If they mean the angels of Heaven, I cannot see what reason they have to expect that their prayer will be heard; I do not find that God hath any where promised, to degrade these glorious Beings, by appointing them centinels over their churches. I think they might rest satisfied with the protection of those saints and martyrs to whom they are dedicated.

In praying to the Almighty, that he would suffer no unquiet schismatics, nor misbelieving hereticks to enter their churches, they discover a very unchristian spirit. How do they know but these wretched beings might be awakened to a sense of their deplorable condition, were they permitted to attend instruction. Numbers far gone in these damning sins might be reclaimed. But how are they to be reclaimed, if they are denied access to the only places, in which the *orthodox faith* is explained and enforced? This treatment is unkind. Hereticks and schismatics have no great reason however to resent the affront. For although the Almighty is intreated to keep

them out of their places of worship while living, yet he is implored to receive them into Heaven after death. Though our church declares them to be everlastingly damned, yet no sooner are they laid in their graves, than it declares their souls to be in Heaven, and solemnly returns thanks to God, that he hath in great mercy taken them to himself.

The prayers for the exclusion of schismaticks and hereticks, also contain supplications for the exclusion of the *Devil* and *corrupt air*. How the state of the atmosphere, without a miracle, is always to be preserved pure in their churches, when foul around them, is what I cannot comprehend, and I do not learn that God has any where promised to perform miracles for this purpose, but if their prayers are really heard, I think you should humbly request them to consecrate your private houses, and even your whole town, for your air is none of the best. As to the expulsion of devils; this has been claimed as a prerogative of consecration prayers, for time immemorial.—Upon the consecration of the Pantheon, the devils were obliged to leave it as well as its divinities.—By one *Sigebert* we are informed, “That the night before the consecration of a church at *Colen*, the devils were heard to make a most dreadful noise, bitterly complaining, that they were to be dispossessed nextday by three metropolitans, who were to consecrate their habitation*.” Upon the authority of Gregory, once an infallible head of the Romish church, we are assured, that upon the consecration of a church defiled by Arianism, the devils that had taken possession of it along with this heresy, were heard to send forth the most hideous

* Sigeb. ad. A. D. 81.

hideous noise, the first night they set up a yelling in the roof of the house, the second it became more dreadful, and the third dreadful beyond description, but of a sudden the uproar ceased, and the devils fled. A few days after, a cloud from Heaven descended on the altar, in a very clear sunshine day, and covered it*. From this you may perceive, that *the form of consecration, according to the use of the church of Ireland, is supported by precedent and example.*

I shall make but a few remarks more on the devotional part of the service.

The prayer which the Bishop offers standing in the cemetery, begins with the following address, "O Almighty God, with whom do live the spirits of them that die in the Lord, grant unto all thy servants, whose bodies shall be buried in this dormitory, that they may ly down with the righteous, and that their souls may be gathered unto their fathers in the bosom of Christ."

If these servants in favour of whom this petition is offered, have really been true and faithful servants, they shall be gathered into the bosom of Christ, whether their bodies were interred in their dormitory or not---If they have not, their being buried in these dormitories will not supply the defect, or be of the least service to them in the other world; for their acceptance there, depends not on the place of their burial, but the actions of their lives. The idea thrown out in this solemn address to God, is calculated to inspire men with comfortable hopes of

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their

* Greg. Dialg. iii. 30.

their after state, provided their bodies are deposited in the earth. And if they have faith enough to follow down this, they will also very readily believe, however little they may have done for their own salvation while living, that yet it may be wrought out for them after death, by the powerful operations of consecrated ground.—And indeed from the manner in which this prayer is worded, it is no easy matter to discover whether it is intended for the living or the dead. Bishop Andrews in his prayer over the burial ground, is very plain and intelligible. “We beseech thee good Lord to *show mercy to the dead* *.”

At the font the Bishop thus begins his devotion, “O eternal God, fountain of all purity, bless and sanctify the waters which thou hast ordained and constituted for the mystical washing away of sin.”

Where these waters are to be found which God hath ordained and constituted for the mystical washing away of sins, I cannot inform you. But considering the need we all have of their purifying virtues, it would be an act of great humanity in our church, to let us know where we might come at them; so far as I can learn no discovery has as yet been made about them in the Bible. As to their mystically washing away sin, I can say as little; only I suppose it is an easier way of clearing scores with Heaven, than by repentance and amendment. But I had almost forgot, that these mystical waters, are supposed to be, effectual in the case of infants only.
Yet

* See his form annexed to a collection of Art. Can, &c. by Sparrow.

Yet surely if they can wash away sin, ~~and~~ ^{if} they never sinned, by the same mystical power, they can ~~also~~ ^{purify} the grown up, who certainly have sinned. I therefore repeat it, it would be an act of the noblest charity, would our church but condescend to tell us where we could find them.---Our Saviour was baptized in the waters of Jordan, but not one word from the history, that they were impregnated with mystical virtues, nor even that John implored God to bless them. Jesus commanded his disciples to baptize all nations, but gave them no direction where to find this holy water, of which our church has in those latter times, made the discovery.---The disciples, in obedience to their master's command, every where baptized their converts, but not one word that the waters they used were blessed and sanctified, ordained and instituted for the mystical washing away of sin. To be serious, a grosser insult was never offered to the majesty of Heaven, than to implore an infusion of spiritual virtues into material substances---Gross, however, as the insult is, they supplicate the Almighty to make holy earth, holy water, holy air, the only element that remains unholy is fire. They may in time, however, consecrate this element also.

I must now bring you to the altar, there the Bishop prays---“ O eternal God, who in thy infinite
 “ mercy to mankind, didst send thy holy Son to be
 “ a sacrifice for our sins---Who also now sits at
 “ thy right hand, and upon the heavenly altar, per-
 “ petually presents to thee, the eternal sacrifice, a
 “ never ceasing prayer, be present with thy servants,
 “ and accept us in the dedication of a ministerial
 “ altar,

“ altar, which we have humbly provided for the
 “ performance of this great ministry, and in imita-
 “ tion of Christ’s eternal priesthood, according to
 “ our duty and his commandment.”

The sense and meaning of these expressions, I must leave to your own sagacity to make out; I honestly confess, they are incomprehensible to me. All I can learn from them, is, that their churches are furnished with *altars*. Wherein the propriety or edification of having altars in the places of christian worship may consist, I have not penetration enough to discover. If our clergy borrow the practice from the Jewish temple, they ought also to remember, that the Jews offered sacrifices, if therefore they think it incumbent upon them, in imitation of this people, to erect altars, they ought after their example, to offer sacrifices also. Might I hazard a conjecture, I would derive the altars of our reformed episcopal churches, from a latter precedent, than that of the temple. When the church of Rome perceived that the sacramental bread and wine were, by the irresistible power of consecration, transubstantiated into the real body and blood of Christ, they concluded, that the symbolic rite was converted into a *real* and *proper* sacrifice: From this discovery, altars were deemed to be indispensibly necessary, and in every church under papal authority, altars were accordingly erected. It may be thought that amidst the *eagerness* and *precipitation* with which our clergy hastened forward the work of reformation, the impropriety of altars totally escaped their attention: Or that they introduced them on purpose to render their churches more inviting to their popish brethren.

Shren *. But I fear, that this and their other accomodating expedients, in place of bringing them over to our church, have only rooted and confirmed them in their own, for their church is consistent, ours is not. If they have altars, they also have instituted a sacrifice. We have altars, but have provided no sacrifice.—Had our church, when they furnished their places of worship with altars, appointed the sacrifice of the Mass also, they would have acted a consistent part, and have shewn that their altars were not without a meaning and design. It is indeed no easy matter to find out what our Bishops may intend by their kneelings, prayers and various movements at the altar; nor to say what construction we are to put upon these acts of veneration they perform in honor of it. Those of the Romish faith assign this substantial reason for their devotions to the altar, that the bread and wine which are placed upon it, are converted into the real body and blood of Christ. Far be it from me to suppose that our church hath the least faith in any such transmutation of the bread and wine placed upon their altars. One thing, however, is certain, that the method appointed in this form according to the use of the church of Ireland, is nearly the same with that which obtains in the church of Rome. What edification the people are likely to derive from the resemblance being kept up, I leave you to consider. I will not trouble you with remarks upon the various

Lessons

* Altars, together with the bowing, kneeling, &c. performed in honor of them, were introduced by Archbishop Laud, under the reign of the royal MARTYR Char. 1st. See Neal's Hist. Vol. ii. p. 211.

Lessons and Hymns of this Irish form, they are of
great use with their prayers.

Thy, Sir, agreeable to your request, have
given me my sentiments at some length, concern-
ing church consecration; what you may now think
of it, I cannot say, but you have my permission to
make what use of this letter you please. I de-
cline entering upon the other subject for the present,
some time hence I may, possibly, take it under
consideration. But I shall now conclude with the
words of a spirited writer. Speaking of consecra-
tion, "I wish, saith he, our Bishops would be
"very sparing in such parts of their sacred func-
"tion, lest while they consecrate churches, they un-
"consecrate themselves, if they dignify these holy
"places, it is with the spoils of their own characters,
"and however *sacred* they make their churches,
"they make themselves extremely *mean*."

I am,

Decem. 5th.

Sir, Yours

Z.



F I N I S.

